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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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SOURCE

1. Listening to foreign broadcasts was not expressly prohibited by Hungarian authorities as late as February 1952. In 1951, however, an order was published in the Official Gazette which stated that the Minister of the Interior was empowered to stop either individuals or groups from listening to foreign radio broadcasts. Few people read the Official Gazette so that this order was not generally known. As all radios had to be registered it would not have been difficult for the Ministry of the Interior to block listening to foreign programs; it would simply mean calling in the radios and removing certain parts which would make it impossible to hear foreign stations.

Most people have listened to VOA since 1945.

Naturally, the people who listened to VOA or RFE did not exactly proclaim it "urbi et orbi"; they were not afraid to listen, but they did not discuss the programs with acquaintances of whose political learnings they were not certain. Most people thought it wiser not to be known as listeners to foreign broadcasts; they did not want to be accused of being sympathizers of the "Imperialist West", so before tuning in they shut the shutters and closed the windows. I believe that 90 per cent of the people who owned radios capable of receiving such programs, listened to VOA and RFE, and that

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about 80 per cent of those who listened believed the broadcasts and liked them. Even key figures in the Communist Party listened; they gave themselves away by casually mentioning some topic that they could have heard only from VOA or RFE. There was, however, a small group of fanatics who did not believe what they heard broadcast from the West.

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2. In Budapest, Gyor , and Szekesfehervar, [] about 30-40 per cent of the families owned tunable radios. In addition there were many radio amateurs who had their own sets. VOA, RFE, and BBC could be heard on 30-35 per cent of these sets. The number of radios has decreased since pre-World War II years; in 1944 the Nazis collected the radios, not only those owned by Jews but most of those owned by other people. (Many people hid their radios in order to keep them.) In 1945 the Soviets collected all the radios. Both times the owners were given receipts so that they could get the radios back, but not many were returned. All owners were required to register their radios with the Post Office; the penalty for not doing so was a fine of 200-300 forints. The tax on any type of radio receiver was 10-13 forints per month. Most repair parts were available and repairs were not expensive; the difficulty was getting tubes for some sets, particularly for the older type receivers. Most radios dated back to pre-World War II years or 1946-47; such receivers as Tungsram, Orion, and Telefunken could receive long, medium, and short waves. The price of these radios (secondhand), [] ranged upward from 1,500 forints. In 1950, a set named Nepradio (People's Radio) was launched on the market; it cost about 400 forints and was usable only for the medium wave band. Produced in Budapest, (by the Standard Factory, which also manufactured telephones) it was intended to enable listeners to hear only Budapest I and Budapest II; actually it was possible to get Frankfurt/Main too. The Nepradio set had no dial, only a knob for turning the radio on and off, and regulating volume. The Moskva radio, made in the USSR, was available at a lower price than Hungarian-made radios; it could be used to receive long, medium, and short waves. New radios could be bought only at the Villrad (Villamessagi es Radio Szakuezlet) government stores. The Teachers' Union at the University bought a combination radio and record player, secondhand, for five thousand forints; most of the teachers thought it was cheap.
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3. Ten or fifteen years ago there were "wired" radio installations. Now factories and larger enterprises, including hospitals, have ordinary radios, centrally controlled, which transmit broadcasts through loud-speakers. Such centralized installations in factories broadcast propaganda, music, and local news. In such cases, selection of the program is not under the control of the listener but of the chief operator and the speakers cannot be turned off at the listening point. Loud-speakers were placed on important thoroughfares in Budapest on occasions of national festivities such as 4 April (Liberation Day) 1 May (Labor Day) and 20 August (Constitution Day). On such occasions speeches were given by Rakosy and other political leaders, music was played, and people danced in the streets.

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4. There has always been jamming of all Western broadcasts to Hungary. Jamming was increased toward the latter part of 1951, but it was not too effective. I would say that 90 per cent of the broadcasts were intelligible. The programs most jammed were news broadcasts, both foreign and domestic; commentaries were not jammed as badly. People had learned how to manipulate their radios, so that even with strong jamming they were able to understand the broadcasts most of the time; by setting the beam a little off the frequency, they could hear more distinctly.
5. It is obvious that not everyone can hear all the programs. The important thing is for those to hear who can transmit the news by word of mouth. Everyone discusses the news; anything that happens in the country is transmitted by word of mouth and the importance of news disseminated in this manner is much greater than is ordinarily realized. The best broadcasting time to assure the maximum number of listeners, especially among the workers, is from 2100 to 2230 hours. The majority of the workers go to the factories at 0700, and even those who work in other enterprises would not have time to listen in the morning. After work in the evening, most people have to attend meetings so that the usual time for listening to foreign broadcasts was after 2015 or 2030. Those people who were at home all day probably listened whenever they could get the broadcast.
6. Western broadcasts are the only source of reliable information, particularly about the West, for the people of Hungary. They are sick of propaganda and news of the Communist Party; they want the truth. When nothing unfavorable was reported about the West on RFE or VOA, people were inclined to dismiss all the news as propaganda. They are hungry for accurate news of Hungary; ranking second is their desire for unbiased world news; thirdly, they are interested in hearing descriptive commentaries on everyday life in the US. The broadcasts of VOA were considered not only more interesting, but also more reliable than the broadcasts of RFE. BBC broadcasts were also considered good. The reputation of RFE suffered when, in the summer of 1951, it named some people as having been deported or arrested, when actually nothing had happened to them. In addition, the Hungarians thought the whole tone of RFE was too propagandistic. On the whole I believe that VOA broadcasts have been well organized and the speakers are good. The news programs have been most interesting, reliable, and well presented. VOA many times predicted changes and measures that were later undertaken by the Hungarian government. The people appreciated this, and the popularity of VOA soared to new heights. When Gizi Bayor, a famous Hungarian actress, and her husband, Tibor German, an ear specialist, committed suicide in 1951, the people learned about it from VOA only as it was announced neither on Hungarian radios nor in the Hungarian press. The same was true of VOA predictions of the mass exile from Budapest in May 1951.
7. I would like to make a few specific suggestions in regard to programs beamed to Hungary by the VOA and other foreign stations:
 - (a) I think more time should be devoted to news; news of Hungary, world news, and news about everyday life in the US.

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- (b) Many Hungarians would defect to the West if they knew how relatively easy it is to cross the border. The belief prevails that the borders are strictly guarded, utilizing dogs and electric wiring, but the professional smugglers know better; they learn about inspection times and patrol schedules and act accordingly.
- (c) The fact that the Pope had excommunicated Roman Catholics who practiced Communism is apparently not widely known in Budapest. Since this is a matter of grave concern to Catholics, I think it should be emphasized.
- (d) Lessons in English, at one time given by the BBC, were very popular with all the students.
- (e) Labor conditions in the US and other Western countries are very interesting to the Hungarian worker. For instance, he would like to hear more about the outcome of strikes, a topic commented upon adversely by the Hungarian press and radio. Comparisons of wages and relative purchasing power in the US and Hungary are of interest to the average person. (The VOA occasionally carried such commentaries; they were very popular.)
- (f) Nobel prize winners are not announced either by the Hungarian radio nor the press; naturally, the Hungarians are interested in descriptions of such people and their work.
- (g) Descriptions of the life of an officer in the US Army and his relationships with his men would be interesting to army personnel. Soldiers do not have an opportunity to listen to foreign broadcasts; this doesn't mean that they hear nothing of the broadcasts. Officers who live in private flats can listen, and word of the broadcasts would get around to the soldiers.
- (h) Descriptions of university life in the US and other Western countries would prove very popular with university students and teachers.
- (i) Parallels from history presented in the form of commentaries would be interesting to the ordinary person; these should not be too long however.

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